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CMA Organizes and Premieres Exhibition of Private Cleveland Collection

CLEVELAND — Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) visitors will be the first to see an exhibition of highlights from the nearly three-decades-long collecting career of Clevelander Muriel Butkin. Butkin owns about 450 French drawings, most from the 18th and 19th centuries, from which 59 have been chosen for the show. Well-known artists represented in the exhibition include François Boucher, Edgar Degas, Théodore Géricault, and Jean-François Millet. **French Master Drawings from the Collection of Muriel Butkin** opens in Cleveland Aug. 26 and remains on view through Oct. 28, 2001. Admission is free. It will travel to the Dahesh Museum, New York (Feb. 19–May 18, 2002).

Museum director Katharine Lee Reid stated: "This exhibition and its accompanying publication celebrate the passion for collecting of one of the Cleveland Museum of Art's greatest donors and benefactors. Thanks to Muriel Butkin and her late husband, Noah, who collected paintings, we have already received many important gifts, works that have shaped the overall character of French art at the museum and enriched our holdings immeasurably. Muriel's drawings reflect a wide scope and an eye for quality shown by a remarkable woman whose taste was ahead of its time by several decades. We at the CMA are deeply grateful to her for lending — and promising — them to us for Clevelanders and CMA visitors from around the world to enjoy."

In her preface to the exhibition's catalogue, Butkin herself comments: "A collector does not truly own his or her treasures but is their temporary custodian. I am glad that my collection will go to the Cleveland Museum of Art."

"My first love was the French 18th century."

CMA associate curator of drawings Carter E. Foster has organized the exhibition roughly, which is presented approximately in chronological order of the works of art. With one exception from perhaps 1655–60 (Michel Dorigny's *Studies of Angels*), the works range from 1703 to about 1898. Butkin's preface offers a few personal insights into how her collection began in the early 1970s: "My first love was the French 18th century. The elegance, refinement, and generally good taste

appealed to my sense of the need for balance and restraint in art and life. Probably at no time have women influenced the arts to such an extent, especially Mme. Pompadour who, with her political intrigues, has been called the virtual ruler of France. She also sponsored Boucher and other artists and was of great importance, as were the brilliant and stimulating salons of such women as Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. du Deffand, and others, which were attended by prominent artists, writers, musicians, and connoisseur-collectors."

Butkin's taste tends toward the human figure and portraits. Foster also points out in his catalogue essay that her promised bequest will make the CMA "a major resource for French art between Neo-classicism and Impressionism," continuing, "Many of the artists she collected are still today relatively unknown and underappreciated." (Butkin says, "I collect drawings, not names.") A few highlights from this period:

- *Head of a Young Man* (probably 1715–17) by Antoine Coypel (1661–1722), in red, black, and white chalk, was bought from the 1976 auction whose catalogue reproduced it for the first time. This study may have been drawn during the artist's work on one of the grieving figures in the oil painting *The Funeral of Pallas* (a scene from Virgil's *Aeneid*) in the Louvre Museum in Paris.
- *Woman in Profile, Turned to the Left* (1784) by Henri-Pierre Danloux (1753–1809) is an oval portrait in charcoal (Danloux's specialty) of an aristocratic woman in her teens or early twenties, fashionably dressed in ruffles and bows, with long, flowing hair.
- *Head of a Young Woman* (about 1785) by Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805) is a red chalk drawings that shows a lively expression of half-smile and darting glance, and may be a head study for the wife and mother in Greuze's finished composition *The Reconciliation*.

"I turned to the 19th century."

It may be difficult now to imagine that buying works by Butkin's favorite 19th-century artist, Edgar Degas, could be a cost-saving measure for a collector. Butkin was ahead of her time in taste, however, which meant she was also ahead of the art market — which eventually caught up with her. From her preface: "When I was priced out of the 18th-century market, I turned to the 19th century....[and] found the artists fine draftsmen and much freer in drawings than in paintings."

Highlights from the 1800s include the following:

- *Man Clutching a Horse in Water, after Poussin's "Deluge"* (about 1816) by Thedore Gericault (1791–1824) is perhaps Butkin's most famous drawing, copying a detail from one of Nicolas Poussin's most celebrated paintings (pen and ink, brush and wash).
- *Jane Jarvis* (1830–31) by Paul (Hippolyte) Delaroche, a pastel heightened with white gouache, portraying the woman wearing black clothing and jewels of the final stages of mourning, was

exhibited along with several major paintings by the artist in the 1831 Salon exhibition that was crucial to Delaroche's career.

- *Young Man Leaning Forward with Outstretched Arms* (about 1851) by Isidore-Alexandre-Augustin Pils (1813–1875) is a study for a begging youth in the now-lost painting *Soldiers Distributing Bread to the Poor*, based on a scene Pils witnessed in Paris (oil, wash, and crayon).
- *Four Studies of the Head of a Young Italian Woman* (1856) by Degas (1834–1917) unites in a graphite drawing the fundamental traits of this artist's work: consummate draftsmanship, captured movements and expression, and an almost obsessive attention to the attitudes of the female figure.
- *Study for the Mother in "The Fisherman's Family"* (about 1875) by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898) was created during the artist's work on his first painting of the subject, which was destroyed in the World War II bombing of Dresden. (A later painting, smaller in size, can be seen at the Art Institute of Chicago.)
- *Head of a Boy Singing* (about 1898) by Luc-Olivier Merson (1846–1920) is a final preparatory study in black, white, and red chalk for a figure near the center of *Music*, one of Merson's mural paintings in the Theatre National de l'Opera-Comique, Paris. A much different drawing by Merson of the hunchback Quasimodo climbing high above the Paris cityscape, *Nôtre-Dame de Paris* (about 1881), created to illustrate a tribute to author Victor Hugo, is reproduced on this exhibition's catalogue cover(ink, wash, gouache, and graphite).

Catalogue Accompanying Exhibition

Authored by Foster with CMA curator of paintings Sylvain Bellenger and [title?] Patrick Shaw Cable, the exhibition's fully illustrated catalogue is the first publication of many of these works of art. (Cable was a Butkin Fellow in art history at Case Western Reserve University, and has recently served the museum as a Kress Fellow in the drawings department.) The book includes a foreword by director Reid, the preface by Butkin and essay about Butkin's taste in drawings by Foster, and entries for each of the 59 works on view. Additional writers of the entries are Kimberly A. Jones, Jerome de La Gorce, Dena M. Woodall, and Carl Wuellner.

Lectures, Gallery Talks Being Planned

Free public programs to complement the exhibition are still in the planning stages. To date, Gabriel P. Weisberg, professor of art history at the University of Minnesota, is scheduled to lecture on "Redrafting the 19th Century: The Butkin Collection in Context" (2 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 16). Weisberg headed CMA's education staff in the 1970s and early 1980s [getting dates from Joellen or

archives] and was a friend of the Butkins. While at the CMA, he organized the 1981–82 international loan exhibition **The Realist Tradition: French Painting and Drawing 1830–1900**, which included 19 of their paintings and drawings.

Education staff will present gallery talks in the exhibition at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 9, and Wednesday, Sept. 12; and at 6 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 14.

Complementary Exhibition on View Simultaneously

To complement the drawings exhibition, CMA will present **Inventive Impressions: 18th- and 19th-Century French Prints**, also on view Aug. 26 through Oct. 28, 2001. This exhibition will include more than 100 works from CMA's permanent collection by such artists as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Jean-Baptist-François Boucher, Edgar Degas, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

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For more information about the CMA and its programs and events, call **1-888-CMA-0033** or visit **www.clevelandart.org**.

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See enclosed checklist for the Butkin exhibition and news release about the complementary exhibition.